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Itinéraires de "déflatés" au Cameroun

Editorial

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Cornelius Bayie Kamanda

- 1 This Bulletin is a contribution to the debate on the reform of the Cameroonian civil service and of State corporations in Cameroon, reforms construed within the framework of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). As will be observed, we have integrated public enterprises in our analysis. In principle, they function according to a similar logics as the civil service, with State subventions and under State control. This explains why public enterprises were required to sign Performance Contracts submitted by the State, within its civil service reform policy which included the rehabilitation of public enterprises. This similarity makes the case of the civil service and that of public enterprises, one and the same thing in our studies.
- 2 In effect, amongst the instruments of the SAP in Cameroon figures the retrenchment of workers from the civil service and state enterprises. This policy aiming at economic rationality and profit, and known better under its French appellation *Programme de la réforme de la fonction publique camerounaise* (PREPC), was applied officially in Cameroon from 1995 ; with main actors that became to be known in French as the "*déflatés*". In effect the term *déflaté* is not found in the French dictionary, but reflects an existing and real global societal phenomenon in Cameroon. It thus means former workers of the civil service and state enterprises (and /or corporations) laid off from their jobs and those who left their jobs voluntarily in consequence of the application of (six) macro-economic policies by the country, namely : the Operation Antilope, the overhauling of the civil service pay roll ; Performance contracts ; the rehabilitation of State enterprises ; the restructuring of the banking system ; state disengagement ; and privatization.
- 3 The analyses in this Bulletin have two major concerns ; firstly the retrenchment policy, and secondly, its main actors : the laid-off-workers. From the perspective of development Anthropology which we here defend, our main objective is to document, analyse and evaluate this macro-economic policy and also to provide an opportunity to share our conclusions with policy makers with developmental concerns.
- 4 The retrenchment policy is one of the options of the developmental role of the State in many Third World countries. The case of Cameroon is just one out of Many. From a

historical perspective, it is possible to establish a certain periodisation in the developmental role of the State in many Third World countries, evolving from a providential role as the main provider, to its withdrawal. In the case of Cameroon, we could up till 1980 observe that the progression in public expenditure on education, on health, on training and on other social programs resulted in improvements in social conditions as was evidenced by the growth in social indicators. But this increase in expenditure took a downward trend in the late 1980s, in spite of the magnitude of public expenditure towards social progress. It would be interesting to question the reasons underlying this modification in the composition of public expenditure in Cameroon that provoked reduction in employment ; and the socio-political context within which this occurred.

- 5 When the observed optimism of the mid 80s in Cameroon was replaced by scepticism of the late 1980s and beyond, the insufficiencies of underlying theoretical models became manifest, with as symptom the economic crises and as corollary the structural adjustment programs. The providential State had failed, even in South East Asia, which had been considered as the model of success by the main funding agencies.
- 6 It was then argued that the failure of the providential State called for a redefinition of the role of the State, in clear, as for employment, it was argued that if the crises did not exert much impact on the reform of the Cameroonian public service of the late 80s, in the early 90s its real impact was being felt and required the reform of the civil service and employment in general, based on the reduction of State intervention, privatization, and the reign of prices as the general regulator of economic behaviors.
- 7 The Cameroonian case falls within this perspectives. According to official documentation (*Commis de l'Etat* January-March 1996), June 19, 1995 marks the official launching of the retrenchment policy in the Cameroonian civil service. The main objectives targeted were articulated around the following three arguments : (a) that of an overpaid civil service ; (b) that of an overstaffed public service ; and (c) that of a revalorization of the real salaries of civil service workers of the Franc zone by the devaluation of the franc CFA. These retrenchments were apparently guided by the following objectives : the mastery of the payroll by a mastery of the number of civil service workers the quest for better returns in the civil service, by improving in efficiency in the public administration.
- 8 Retrenchment was therefore expected to contribute to the cuts in the numbers of public service workers, which in some cases and up till 1987, were alleged to have recorded an annual growth of 10 %.
- 9 Official documentation on the consequences of the economic crises on labour and employment, projected the layoff of 30.000 workers in all sectors of the public service and state enterprises. By voluntary or forced departures, the numbers of public service workers declined from 188.200 in 1990 to 155.210 in May 1995. During the same period, the total amount of wages passed from 300 billion francs to 190 billion francs CFA annually. (Social Dimension of Adjustment Project 1990).
- 10 Assisted by a 8 billion francs subvention by the *Caisse française de développement*, and the Cameroonian public treasury, retrenched (or laid-off) workers received 24 months of their basic salaries on departure, salary arrears of September and October 1993, arrears memorized in the computers of the salary department, subscriptions and contributions in the form of pension benefits (being 10 % for the fonctionnaires, and 7 % for those covered by the labor code). As an example, of the 105 persons retrenched from the Ministry of the

Public Service and Administrative Reforms, the respective amounts of compensation varied between 1.016 511 and 6.039 560 francs CFA. (*Commis de l'Etat* n°5 Nov-Dec 1999). As backup to these reforms, the Social Dimension of Adjustment component (1990) initially proposed to meet this challenge through the implementation of a series of measures aimed at improving on the labor market and the creation of new jobs ; by actions permitting the recycling and reinsertion of an impressive number of workers into the labor market in general.

- 11 Our main concern is that the implementation of the 1995 and current retrenchment policies have to be assessed in terms of their appropriateness, poverty concerns, and the government's capacity to implement its developmental objectives.
- 12 The contribution of *Bayie Kamanda* provides an assessment of the necessity for the application of the retrenchment policy. He points out that the retrenchment policy tries to cope with three main arguments, namely : an overpaid civil service, an overstaffed public service ; and a revalorization of the real salaries of civil service workers of the Franc zone by the devaluation of the Franc CFA is not established. Drawing the historical lessons of the employment policies of the 1980s in Cameroon (prior to the application of the 1995 retrenchments), he observes that government policy in this matter was targeted towards the reinforcement and the extension of the protection of employees facing different risks :
 - the organization of professional relationships within the enterprises in the direction of a better understanding between social partners,
 - the progressive reduction in inequalities between the different groups of workers themselves,
 - the respective sectors and zones,
 - the harmonization of texts and structures at the national level.
- 13 The 1980s employment and civil service reforms in Cameroon were pegged on three important aspects :
 - the relationship between employment (or jobs) and social welfare,
 - the easing (or) reduction in poverty,
 - participation, good governance and the current conception of democracy.
- 14 The following references are representative of the above pay and employment concerns :
 - a fundamental reform in the pay roll introduced by the Decree of 3 May 1976 which suppressed the notions and practices of SMIG and SMAG (bottom salaries on industry and agriculture) ;
 - the upward revision of salaries in the civil service.
- 15 These measures improved on the working conditions and plight of workers found in the lower salary scales. It is in this respect that in what is termed the zone ID in Cameroon (representing the lowest salary scales), and for the first three categories, the cumulative increase in salaries was in the order of 40% in 1980 (Ahmadou 1980).
- 16 Workers protection against aggressions and risks likely to undermine or reduce purchasing power, family allowances, industrial accidents, and professional illnesses, old age, pension and deaths were introduced into the Cameroonian system of social insurance. All of the above measures were carried out by the government in consultation with interested social partners and stake holders. The 1995 retrenchments in Cameroon therefore broke away from the employment and labor policy of the late 1980s.

- 17 Mbonji observes that lay-offs (including voluntary departures) from the civil service have taken a new expression in the practical and linguistic spheres in Cameroon, of "*déflation*" and of "*déflatés*" (both in French) referring to these compressions as already understood. These departures, according to the demands of the Social dimension of the adjustment (SDA-1990) of the Structural adjustment program (SAP) were accompanied by some specified funding levels ; code name "Self employment encouragement premium". This observation brings him to analyse the socio-economic background which led to the implementation of the retrenchment policy, the administrative and reglementary environment which was to welcome the retrenched, and the cultural conversion of the state agent not into an unemployed staff, but into an employer.
- 18 He concludes with the observation that the Cameroonian government did not carry out in-depth studies on the fate of this socio-professional category victims of the economic crises of 1987 and of the entry of the International Monetary Fund a few years later. Undoubtedly restricted by the draconian and strict options imposed by the institutions of Bretton Woods he observes, the Cameroon government did not seem to have taken the necessary steps in order to formulate appropriate policies for the reinsertion of retrenched workers into the private sector by rationally organised inducements into self employment.
- 19 Nzhie Engono provides a case study of the retrenched workers of the Ministry of Scientific and Technical Research (Minrest). In principle this Ministry has three main categories of specialised workers : researchers, research technicians, and support staff.
- 20 The first category, the researchers, were normally required to contribute to formulate the retrenchment policy and the conversion or reinsertion of the retrenched workers into the economic and active life. According to this observation therefore, the retrenched workers of this institution were in regular contacts with the researchers and thus received expertise from the researchers on their opportunities for conversion into productive activities offered to them in this matter.
- 21 It is in this context that the case study could serve as a barometer for the evaluation of the retrenchment policy in general. The case study lays bare certain cardinal observations ; especially the ambivalence in which the retrenched worker finds himself.
- 22 An ambivalence which all the same underlines the difficulties of reinsertion of the retrenched worker into productive activities for the following reasons : the jealousy of parents and friends, difficulties of being accepted in their destinations because the retrenched worker became the target of exploitation, and was rejected when he failed to respond to this exploitation by the villagers, etc..
- 23 These consequences are identical to those faced by several return migrants in resettling back home. Representations of the return migrant (retrenched worker) by the populations, make of him somebody who must share his benefits with his brethren. In some cases, the quest for this redistribution (of his retrenchment premium) makes of him a "milk cow" (*vache à lait*). Meanwhile the "reinsertion premium" unless invested in an appropriate manner is wasted. In this evolution, the drying up of this resource leads to a multitude of crises ; family crises, crises in relationships, regularly established by the theft of his property, but fundamentally by the difficulty associated with "taking care" of the upkeep of his extended family. In this manner, the article raises the problem of the management of family solidarity for the retrenched worker and concludes on the real

difficulty of that management. Hence it throws doubt on the real efficiency of retrenchment, providing necessary security for the individual as well as for the group.

- 24 According to *Jean Nzhie Engono* therefore, the operation of retrenchment in Cameroon is a general illustration of a double tendency of the government towards an overhauling of the number of workers of the civil service with the payment of premiums for their reinsertion into economic and social life. He argues that this premium is not a sufficient condition, as the government should have done more. Thus because of the absence of a more aggressive policy in these reforms (beyond the application of legal and administrative regulations), these measures came up against the obstacle of traditional management and governance practices in Cameroon, which still lack the mechanisms of rationality and forecasts, and therefore concur to render developmental action superficial and non-operational in practice.
- 25 In this manner, he observes, we could argue that the retrenchment operation, by being built on improvisation and anarchy, reflects regular lack of firmness or meandering characteristic of the Cameroonian socio-political order, dominated by small groups (prebendal politics) and subject to the weights of malpractices and of the corruption widespread in the whole society. Above all, it permits us to ask the fundamental question about what could be the chances, the pertinence and the ambition of such an administrative reform in a society as refractory to real change, and in which the rule of life remains the manifestation of opposition and resistance to each government policy instruments by the, civil society.
- 26 The first article of *John Forje* "Rethinking the role of integrity at the public-private interface : Coherence or confusion" goes beyond the Cameroonian situation to propose a new cartography of Africa at the dawn of the third millennium. The article examines the impact of policy on democracy and citizenship. He identifies policies that can better balance and integrate the public and private sectors with the ultimate goal to provide a better standard of living to the populations within available resources.
- 27 Three forms of integrity in the public interface are discussed ; the traditional problem of control, of policy implementation (and lastly) of ethical and moral rectitude. The author argues that while the public sector is oriented towards profit maximization at the cost of reduced investments, for consensus and compromise, the private sector is conceived on the basis of economic efficiency, quality management, productivity and competitive advantage. The perception of public and private by the society is discussed from two perspectives : governance, and a radical *mouvance* in the government and the civil society.
- 28 The second article of *John Forje* "Building a vibrant state : Civil society in Cameroon ; facing the challenges of the new millennium", is a critical examination of the State-civil society agreements, which argue that drastic changes are required for the State both at the national and international levels in the face of the challenges of the third millennium.
- 29 At the national level, mental and institutional changes are fundamental in the role and responses of the civil society towards the construction of an integrated and constructive country. In a global manner, a new order is an obligation to redress the disparity existing in the international division of labor and employment. Above all, a new form of partnership and sharing of responsibilities among the different interest groups has to be established and sustained between the State and the civil society, as well as between the North and the South.

- 30 He finally lays emphasis on the women and other vulnerable groups in the mainstream of development through an approach of strategic development, oriented towards the population. A basic aspect remains that of cultivating and institutionalizing democratic governance, the rule of law and of equity in the distribution of the wealth of the nation.
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